

dition of the very poor even in countries where the general birth-rate is declining, may be connected with a sparseness or irregularity of diet which brings into their life something of the conditions of man's natural or savage state. The English peerage may fairly be taken to represent conditions of ease and luxury : few patents of nobility outlast the course of three centuries.

It also seems to be true that idleness is prejudicial to fecundity. Breeders are well aware of the importance of keeping their stock well exercised. But in the case of women, labour must not be too fatiguing: their employment in factories appears to lessen their capacity for child-bearing. And disease may, of course, severely check the increase of a population : repeated attacks of fever cause an enfeeblement of virility which may end in impotence. For the rest, the causes which at the present day are lowering the average size of families appear to have more connection with the culture than with the environment of society.

Environment and the race

Scientific opinion is sharply divided as to the inheritance of acquired peculiarities. One school of thought not only insists that peculiarities acquired by the individual may become innate in the race, but regards the acquirement of peculiarities as the principal means by which plants and animals have developed their multiform species. Another school

denies that acquired characters are heritable. and is persuaded that the differences which divide one species from another have their origin in spontaneous mutations or variations. It fortifies its conclusion by maintaining that the reproductive tissue—or germ-plasm—is entirely distinct from the sentient and active body, and